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Written statement* submitted by the International Council of Russian Compatriots (ICRC), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2018]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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On Violations of the Rights of Tatar People in Ukraine

Representatives of the Tatar community call on the international community to exert the most serious pressure on Ukraine in order to restore the humanitarian and property rights of the Tatars, who densely inhabit the Kherson oblast of this country.

We are extremely concerned about the fate of our fellow countrymen, our people, who in the past 70 years suffered a violent deportation, then settled with great difficulty in their former residence, and are again subjected to illegal repression and persecution with the full connivance of Kiev authorities, while the international community and mass media fail to mention these facts.

To let you understand the situation, we will explain that the absolute majority of 230,000 Tatars live in the nearest regions of Ukraine: Kherson oblast and Zaporizhia oblast. About 15,000 Tatars live in these regions, mainly in the Novoalekseevka village of Henichesk Raion.

The present report is devoted to the concern about the fate of this part of the long-suffering Tatar people. Almost every day, Tatar non-governmental organizations receive appeals from our compatriots, Tatars living in Ukraine, who are asking to influence the situation in Henichesk. In particular, they state that the Tatars of the Kherson oblast are 'intimidated, since there are many armed groups' of an extremist radical organization that calls itself Mejlis. Reports of robbery, violence and pillage against the local Tatar population are published regularly in local media, forcing the inhabitants of the region to form self-defence units. The scale of the problem is also evidenced by the fact that in February 2017, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine finally decided on a police force operation in the Kherson oblast, in the Chongar region, against the so-called Noman Chelebidzhikhan battalion consisting of armed fighters hired by the leadership of the Mejlis, which had lost even the slightest signs of legitimacy after the general congress of the Tatars held in this year. It is characteristic that even the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) accuse the Mejlis of attempts to counter the army units of Ukraine.

Let's come up with data—little-known to a wide audience—on the protest movement of Tatar carriers in the Henichesk Raion in the winter of 2017. The fact is that, traditionally, the job of Tatars from the villages of Novoalekseevka and Partizan was connected with the transit of people, vegetables and fruits along the railway and the highway. With the artificial blockade by the Ukraine, traffic in this direction was significantly reduced and the markets for fruits and vegetables were lost. There remained only a small segment related to the transportation of people. But today, even this business is forcibly taken away from the ordinary folks by the Mejlis acting on behalf of the state of Ukraine. On the instructions of one of the Mejlis leaders, Lenur Islyamov, a fee of US $200 is levied on each person crossing the border by quasi-military illegal formations, which makes transportation unprofitable. This means that Tatars living in Novoalekseevka lose their jobs and are put on the brink of survival. In the region of total unemployment, a humanitarian catastrophe is actually brewing. Thus, it becomes obvious that the Tatar population of the south of the Kherson oblast is being actively manipulated by radical extremist groups that have the support of the official Kiev authorities.

Desperate people are protesting actively against such treatment. For example, at a spontaneous meeting, the Tatars of the Kherson oblast have recorded a video message to the President of Ukraine, P. Poroshenko. This video is still freely available on the internet; anyone can see it. I will cite only a few passages from this emotional document: 'We do not have a strong representative of the Tatars of Kherson oblast. Nobody protects our rights. In the Henichesk Raion, we are insulted in local media, we are called "wild game", "wild Tatars", "blacks"... Nobody supports us, we do not know how to protect ourselves.'

There is a continuing practice of illegal raiding and seizing property of the Tatars who for some reason do not want to support the Ukrainian radical armed groups and take sides. In this regard, most indicative is the fate of the property complex belonging to the well-known Tatar public figure and businessman Seytumer Nimetullayev, who lived until 2014 in the Henichesk Raion of the Kherson oblast of Ukraine. He used to be a deputy of the Raion council and its chairman, and he is an honoured worker of agriculture, awarded with Ukraine state awards. Tatars living in the Kherson oblast elected him twice as a delegate to the Qurultay (the congress of the Tatar people), which testifies to the high authority of this person. Suffice it to say that the Nimetullayev family, engaged in charity, built an Orthodox church along with a mosque in the village of Novoalekseevka in Henichesk Raion. Three criminal cases have been opened against S. Nimetullayev by the new authorities of Ukraine, and the trials are still pending. According to one of them, he is charged under a political article for 'separatism'. The second one mentions an official crime, declaring that the businessman allegedly committed abuses during the allocation of land in the Henichesk Raion when he was the head of the local administration. The third case is a dispute between economic entities. But on this basis, a group of armed people seized and expropriated his property in the Henichesk Raion, including a hotel complex, a market, a sanatorium

in the Arabat Spit and a number of other facilities—in particular, an agricultural enterprise in the Chongar region of 20,000 hectares— worth a total of $30 million. He himself is unable to return to his homeland because of a farfetched criminal prosecution. Today, the enterprise of S. Nimetullaev, which employed more than 600 people of different nationalities, is ruined, the employees are left without work and their families have lost their income. He himself is forced to seek refuge. These actions once again show how distant the real actions of the Ukrainian authorities are from their declarative commitment to the principles of European legality, the priority of the right of private property, and the presumption of innocence.

To sum up, we are forced to state that for 25 years since the mass return of the Tatars to the Kherson oblast, the Tatar 'question' has remained unresolved for Ukraine. This is evidenced by the unsettled problem of land relations and the poor representation of the Tatars in local executive and legislative bodies, as well as the lack of a full-fledged education system in their native language. It is carried out on an optional basis in places inhabited densely by the Tatars in the Henichesk Raion, despite the fact that, for example, in the school No. 1 of Novoalekseevka village, Tatars total 300 out of 500 pupils. In Ukraine, there is still a hidden discriminatory practice of restricting employment on a national basis, observed secretly in the sphere of public administration, in the appointments of the leaders in culture and education, law enforcement agencies, and so on.

Tatars are experiencing great problems with the registration in Ukraine of their legal status as a people who suffered from illegal repression during the existence of the USSR. For example, the Administration of the Henichesk Raion of the Kherson oblast denies regularly the registration of the corresponding status to the Tatars because of the lack of certificates confirming the stay of their families in special settlements and camps. The documents of the Russian model issued after March 2014 are not valid in mainland Ukraine, as well as documents from Uzbekistan where Tatars lived in exile for a long time. This is only one of numerous examples, but it illustrates the general tendency of the real disregard of the Ukrainian authorities towards the Tatar people and their problems.

Taking into account all the above facts, we call upon the international community, upon all those who in fact, not in words, take care of observance of fundamental human rights, to consolidate their position in order to influence the Ukrainian authorities and achieve their full compliance with the generally accepted humanitarian and social norms in relation to the Tatars living in the Kherson oblast, as well as the return of seized property. We also demand that the territory of the region be immediately freed from illegal extremist armed formations, which will allow the Tatars to pursue their traditional way of life and to maintain contacts freely with their fellow countrymen and representatives of their ethnic group